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AUTHOR Glick, Irvin David
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ABSTRACT

This monograph discusses the question of whether or not student teachers can be effective agents of change in the institutions where they are actively involved. Change agents are defined here as personnel who have the authority and leadership ability to carry out a broad range of programs for growth in the school. While the student teacher lacks the maturity to act in this capacity, there are certain areas in which he/she may be effective in developing new perspectives. These areas are in the realm of curriculum design, fields where the student teacher has had previous experience, and in a team teaching situation. (JD)

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Student Teachers as Change Agents--A Question
of Expectations, Roles, and Settings

by

Irvin David Glick
Associate Dean

Division of Professional Studies
State University College at Oswego
Oswego, New York

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At recent meetings and conferences of teacher educators, lively and sometimes heated discussions have occurred which have focused on the idea that student teachers can perhaps be looked upon and utilized as overt and direct change agents for school programs. It has been suggested that, by virtue of their recent exposure in education courses to systems approaches, team teaching, inquiry training, or to value clarification techniques, student teachers can by their very presence in a classroom educate the in-service professional staff. This thesis further speculates that these interactions can be sufficiently vigorous and persuasive so as to significantly assist in retooling the in-service faculty to adopt such program thrusts as individualization of instruction, personalization of curriculum, or systems-based accountability for educational achievement. The position established in this paper is that student teachers may indeed act as subtle or mildly catalytic agents for change, but cannot assume a central, on-line change agent's role in any one of these current trends or in any programmatic efforts of similar scope and complexity. In order to develop this premise more completely, the following definitions of student teachers and central, on-line change agents are specified:

Student teachers - pre-service undergraduates who are completing their professional education sequence of courses, usually college seniors, with a full semester or quarter of full-time, all-day, in-school practice or student teaching. Internships for fifth year programs or partially-salaried, pre-tenure internships lasting a full school year are excluded from this definition. The student teachers being described are completing an eight-to-sixteen week intensive teaching assignment under the direct supervision of a classroom-based cooperating teacher and a college or university supervisor.

Central, on-line change agents - are the building or system-wide management

personnel who have administrative line designations or offices with accompanying authority and responsibility for specific professional growth programs. These persons carry a variety of titles: principals, assistant or associate principals for curriculum/instruction, supervisors, project directors (for special programs), directors of instruction, and so on. These personnel are selected, hopefully, for their leadership skills and abilities in carrying out a broad range of professional growth activities (Anderson, 1969):

1. conducting or organizing in-service programs.
2. initiating, with teacher in-put, curriculum modifications.
3. securing special site and inter-school visitations for teachers.
4. helping codify and clarify staff needs and concerns.
5. studying, evaluating, and assisting in decision-making processes.
6. securing financial support for special projects.
7. assisting in regular review and up-dating of goals and objectives.
8. developing and inaugurating study groups and standing committees.
9. assisting teachers to evaluate and refine their teaching capabilities and repertoires.
10. seeking and solidifying community support for school and/or system-wide programs.
11. developing and implementing action as well as basic researches and investigations.
12. maintaining records for development of an historical perspective on program evolution and direction.

While this list is certainly not exhaustive, it is illustrative of those behaviors which are often carried out by central, on-line change agents.

Can student teachers (as defined) act as change agents (as defined)? No, not at all, and the reasons are fairly obvious. Student teachers have neither the expertise nor the authority to assume the role of a designated, administrative, on-line change agent. Furthermore, student teachers are usually faced with many of their own pressing concerns during student teaching which would preclude their engaging in these types of activities even if they possessed the requisite expertise. There are exceptions, of course -- students who are ready and able to step right into teaching with the confidence, maturity, and

ability which belies their relative youth. However, for the overwhelming majority of student teachers, uncertainty is not outright fear about a host of concerns seems to be the more frequent case:

1. Will the kids like me?
2. Will my supervisor(s) be kind and patient with me?
3. Who will I have trouble with in my classes, and what will I do if I'm challenged by a student?
4. Will I get an A or will my "accum" suffer?
5. Will my boy or girl friend be patient and understanding if I have papers to grade and can't go out on a date?
6. Will I stutter or make a fool of myself in front of the class?
7. Will I blush or get flustered and choke up in class?
8. Will I catch "mono" and have to drop out of student teaching - thus delaying graduation another term?
9. Will I be able to survive until student teaching is over?
10. Will my supervisor let me try out some of my own ideas, and will I get help if I stumble or goof up?
11. Will they let me have a day off so I can register for my last term of courses -- I've got to pick up that poli. sci. course that I still need for graduation.
12. Will my acne flare up and make me look awful?

These concerns may be overdrawn or may distort the picture, but they are not far from the truth. Up to the time of student teaching, even with prior field experiences, the student teacher has been a student. Now the student teacher has moved over to the other side of the desk, as it were, and the mantle of nearly total professional responsibility is not worn as easily as it may have previously appeared. Couple this with the kinds of personal concerns which most student teachers seem to have and student teaching becomes a demanding and taxing experience.

It should be clear then that student teachers have quite enough to do during student teaching just by meeting and dealing with their personal concerns and the school's and their supervisors' demands without also acting

as the kind of change agent previously described. If this foregoing analysis is passingly accurate, what realistic expectations can there be for a student teacher to act as a subtle or mildly catalytic agent for change? There seem to be three promising settings or sets of conditions wherein a student teacher may act as a subtle or mildly catalytic agent for change:

1. Wherein the sponsoring institution (college or university) and the laboratory institution (school site for student teaching) have regularly collaborated toward realizing a specific instructional program or curriculum design (e.g. multi-unit schools, mastery-learning curricula, individualized instruction, open-education, etc.), the student teacher, if previously prepared to be active in a specific capacity which positively reflects a given role in that collaborative effort, can indeed strengthen and extend that particular thrust or program.
2. Wherein the student teacher has had prior-to-student teaching, extensive and mediated field experiences as part of the professional education preparation sequence in the same school in which the student teaching experience will be conducted, and if that previous experience was positively and enthusiastically viewed by the school faculty and administration, then the prospective student teacher's credibility may be already well-established. This situation facilitates many potentially positive opportunities for the student teacher to "try out new ideas" which might indeed be new or at least novel to the laboratory faculty. If some of these practices are adopted by the in-service faculty, then the student teacher has acted as a de facto catalyst for change (a quiet subversive).
3. Wherein the laboratory institution has already established teaching teams which view as part of their mission a cooperative, collegial preparation role with the sponsoring institution, the student teacher may experience a very special type of culminating pre-service adventure. The teaching team will welcome the student teacher as a co-equal professional; will solicit ideas, impressions and suggestions

from the student teacher; will implement and field-test some of these suggestions; will gradually induct the student teacher into a hierarchically sequenced series of increasingly complex assignments and responsibilities; and will insure maximum co-participation for the student teacher in all aspects of the school's program. This arrangement can provide a setting for cooperative growth for all of the parties involved--in-service, pre-service, as well as university/college personnel.

In summary, the claim has been made that student teachers cannot (and perhaps should not) be expected to act as on-line change agents. However, where special collaborative efforts between sponsoring and laboratory institutions exist, where extensive mediated field experiences prior to the student teaching component have engendered credibility and positive receptivity in the school's faculty for the student teacher, and, where collegial teaching teams have already committed themselves to a cooperative model for professional induction experiences for prospective teachers as part of their mission, student teachers can be expected to act as subtle or mildly catalytic agents for change. To expect or demand more of a student teacher as an overt and direct force for systematic program redesign is to ignore both affective and political realities.

¹Anderson, Vernon E., Curriculum Guidelines In An Era Of Change, New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1969, pp. 98-105.